



Master Plan Update Report

For the 3/7/19 Joint PC/BCC Work Session

This report discusses the status of the Master Plan and includes staff comments regarding the need for a limited Plan update.

Recent Discussion

In 2017, Routt County Planning Department staff scheduled public meetings as part of a series of community-wide outreach discussions. During each meeting, staff provided information about functions of the Planning Department, clarified select County Regulations, and reviewed achievements of the Master Plan. The objective of the series of meetings was to meet Routt County strategic initiative goals and determine if the Master Plan continued to serve the community as originally intended.

Approximately 50 residents including County staff and members of Planning Commission joined the discussion at four different locations throughout the County. Planning staff explained that the Master Plan's overall vision is to preserve the western rural character of Routt County. They also discussed how its policies have been used to guide development in unincorporated areas. To get input from community members about the Master Plan, the following question was asked: *"Have the needs and values of the citizens of Routt County changed or do they remain as reflected in the 2003 plan?"* Both the community and Planning Commission confirmed the current validity of the Plan and agreed that the plan should remain active. Therefore, no change to the plan was considered. However, the findings regarding the support for the Master Plan were never formally adopted. Optimally, the level of involvement during the outreach discussions could have been greater in order to make the above determination.

Considerations for Change

Increasing pressures from a growing population and tourism may challenge the applicability of certain policies in the plan. Historically, land uses such as short-term rentals, workforce housing, and some recreational operations have been viewed as commercialization of land in the Agricultural Forestry zone district and not consistent with the adopted Master Plan. Currently, such uses are deemed incompatible with the Plan if located outside of a designated Growth Center. Over the past few years, staff has heard community comments that the County should do more to address certain problems while maintaining the Plan's overall vision of protecting our rural character.

Staff has compiled a list of several land use policies that may possibly conflict with today's community goals. They are attached as *Appendix A*. The question to be answered is: *Have*

circumstances changed to such a degree that some level of review and amendment of the Plan and its policies is appropriate in order to properly address the pressures of population and tourism? This is the basis of the proposed Master Plan amendment discussion. In addition, staff will identify areas of the plan staff believes should be considered for amendment.

The Master Plan's designation of Growth Centers has been a very successful tool in preserving the rural character and heritage of the County. However, staff acknowledges that current demographics and growth trends need to be assessed to answer the questions: *Where is the appropriate location for future growth and development in the County? Is development within the designated Growth Centers and Stagecoach enough to support current trends?* Are there other areas such as the Steamboat II Metro District area, Phippsburg, and Milner that may be good options to consider for growth?

The County has identified certain land uses outlined in the regulations on the *Uses by Zone District Chart* that may be considered appropriate outside of Growth Centers through use permits. Staff acknowledges the important role that recreation and tourism play in the viability of the County and in preserving its agricultural operations. Staff also recognizes that balancing these operations at sustainable levels (while supporting the local economy) is challenging. There are some new land use trends in recreation and tourism that could be considered under an updated Plan that is in sync with a changing community while continuing to maintain rural character.

In addition, the 2003 Plan offers little mention of the cumulative impacts associated with the increasing number of approved permits in rural Routt County.

Routt County's open lands and critical wildlife habitats are paramount to the health and identity of the County. Policies that protect and manage our resources are addressed in the Plan but should be reviewed for effectiveness, as development pressures potentially threaten these resources. In addition, policies that ensure a more consistent evaluation of acceptable intensities and cumulative impacts of all land uses could be given more emphasis.

Although policies supporting transportation and connectivity are identified in Plan, they should also be reviewed to determine if they remain appropriate and reflect changes in our community over the past 20 years.

These issues and the continuing evolution of a growing community support a limited update, but scoping sessions with the community would confirm what an update to the Master Plan would entail. An update would also allow for current decision makers, staff and the community to take ownership of the plan and its policies.

Long Range Planning

While conditions may have evolved, the role of long range planning has always been to guide the future growth and development of Routt County with a philosophy that balances private property rights with the long-term goals of the community. Since the adoption of the County's first Master Plan and through the current version, the primary goal of planning in Routt County has been to protect the area's western rural character and agricultural heritage while accommodating appropriate development. The Master Plan continues to support this community goal by providing broad recommendations and guidance on land use in the County.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations are the tools for implementing the Master Plan. Routt County routinely maintains, updates, and administers these regulations. Just as the County makes annual “housekeeping” amendments to the Regulations, so should our community plans be updated periodically to ensure that they continue to serve as originally intended.

To date, the Master Plan remains the oldest active land use document in the County, with the exception of the Town of Yampa Master Plan (adopted 1998) and the Routt County Open Lands Plan (adopted 1995). All the land use plans in the County have been reviewed to some degree since 2003 to determine their continuing applicability. Although the overarching philosophies and policies of the Master Plan are likely to remain the same, staff recommends a formal dialogue with the community to properly address recent community comments. A summary on the status of all plans in Routt County is attached to this report as *Appendix B*.

At a recent Planning Commission meeting, the Commission was asked to provide a list of Master Plan issues for discussion including areas of the Plan that could possibly be amended. While the overall position of the members was that the Plan is still relevant and that no major changes are warranted, they decided that attention should be focused on addressing current wildlife habitat protection and the connectivity between Growth Centers.

After input from the community, Planning Commission, and the Board of County Commissioners, staff will develop a timeline for completion and adoption. The kick-off for Plan amendment can begin in the summer of 2019 with completion depending upon the scope of necessary revision.

The following list summarizes the items either not currently addressed in the Master Plan or that should be revisited to ensure an accurate reflection of community values. Staff suggests that this list be considered the starting point for possible amendments.

1. Modernize the language, maps and pictures
2. Review action items and modify as necessary
3. Analyze policies that guide local's and workforce housing in the unincorporated County
4. Consider goals and policies that address climate change
5. Address the current expectations associated with the telecommunication industry
6. Include guidance for making variance decisions (Board of Adjustment)
7. Include demographics and growth trends
8. Address recreation and tourism pressures
9. Describe appropriate intensity of use to avoid the commercialization of the AF zone
10. Include parameters to address the cumulative impacts of development and multiple land uses
11. Update wildlife information to reflect the current conditions
12. Ensure oil & gas policies do not conflict with COGCC standards
13. Address transportation and connectivity between Growth Centers
14. Reformat to make the Plan more user-friendly on the internet

APPENDIX A

Example of policies considered for review

- 3.3.A: New residential, commercial and industrial developments and uses should occur within the vicinity of designated growth centers and in compliance with the adopted comprehensive plans of those areas.

Staff comment: As stated in the Master Plan, dispersed and random residential, commercial and industrial development and uses contribute to urban sprawl. To protect the County's rural character, new urban development and other high-intensity uses should be located within Growth Centers. This concept is repeated throughout the Master Plan, specifically in the policies below. It is staff's opinion that creating and supporting this policy has been the major factor in establishing and preserving today's quality of life in Routt County. All conversations regarding Plan amendment should start with the review of this policy.

- 4.3.B: Use permits that significantly alter the historical use, intensity of use, or character of an area may be deemed incompatible with this plan.

Staff comment: This policy in particular is in direct conflict with supporting nightly rentals. As it has been stated, renting one's home on a nightly basis or for a period of less than 30 days at a time may commercialize an agricultural or residential area. The potential for increased traffic, parking, noise and turnover can alter the nature and character of an area. In later chapters the Master Plan supports the preservation of community character and retention of neighborhoods with full-time residents to enhance livability for families.

- 6.3.A: Recreation and tourist-based development and use intensity should be comparable to traditional agricultural use intensity. Intensity of permitted use should be proportional to permitted acreage.

Staff comment: Routt County has become increasingly popular in all seasons for recreation and tourism activity, and visitors are looking for alternatives to the traditional hotel stay in the form of nightly rentals of private homes. As stated in the plan, cumulative impacts of intense recreational activity, if unmitigated, will degrade the County's rural character and its valley and mountain resources. Therefore, the goal of the Master Plan is to only allow recreation and tourism uses that are compatible with the surrounding rural character and agricultural lands. Can this policy be better worded to quantify an acceptable intensity of use?

- 10.3.C: Approval of development should be kept in or near growth centers.

- 10.3.I: Discourage development that changes the rural character of historic agricultural uses and/or practices.

Staff comment 10.3I & 10.3.C: Recent recreational, residential and commercial growth in the County has created concerns about sustaining the agricultural community and the rural character of Routt County. To protect and maintain the viability of Routt County's agricultural lands, the County supports projects that conserve land for viable agricultural activities and buffer areas between urban development, non-agricultural uses and agricultural lands. Like intensity of use, should this policy better quantify historic ag uses?

- 12.3.A: Routt County supports a broad range of housing opportunities in every Growth Center. Affordable housing should be integrated into existing neighborhoods and communities, preferably close to civic/social amenities.
- 12.3.E. The County encourages the retention of neighborhoods with full-time residents to enhance livability for families.
- 12.3.F. The County encourages consistency regarding Steamboat Springs, and other incorporated towns (County Growth Centers) on secondary units and other housing policies.
- 12.3.G: The County encourages a fair and equitable distribution of the burden of providing affordable housing among all elements of the community. A committed partnership of private, public, and nonprofit sectors should be developed. The development and real estate community, the community at-large, the tourist and recreation based businesses, residential communities, local governments, and housing-related nonprofits should be included in this partnership.
- 12.3.H: In order to maintain housing for full-time residents, the County shall prohibit short-term rentals outside of Growth Centers, except in certain circumstances within select zone districts or use permits.

Staff Comments 12.3.A, E- H: Although the Master Plan supports a broad range of housing opportunities, some types of housing, like short-term rentals, are only allowed in Growth Centers where civic and social amenities are generally located. The County's growth centers are its incorporated areas and the lands adjacent to them (and potentially Stagecoach). A County-wide short-term rental permit system would be contrary to Policy 12.3.E, unless neighborhoods with full-time residents, such as many places with residential zoning, are excluded. Policy 12.3.H would be in contradiction to the approval of a County-wide short-term rental permit system. Should the Plan be amended to accommodate the demand for this type of lodging activity or left as-is?

Master Plan: Adopted April 3, 2003.

The Master Plan outlines policies that guide future development in the unincorporated portions of the County and provides broad recommendations and guidance for land use in the County.

Community Outreach 2017 – Community reaffirmed the validity of the Plan but the findings were never formally adopted.

Community Plans

- Steamboat Springs Area Community Plan (adopted 2004, amended 2014)
- Yampa Master Plan (adopted 1997)
- Oak Creek Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2010, amended 2015)
- Hayden Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2005)

Sub Area Plans

- Stagecoach: (adopted 1999, amended 2017)
 - The Plan was intended to be a 20-year vision describing the community's preferred character and providing the basic framework for future growth in Stagecoach. Scoping for the update began in late 2014. The Stagecoach Plan was scheduled for adoption in 2016, when the largest potential land owner in Stagecoach (the purchasers of the ski area), finally came to the table. Because of this, adoption of the plan was put off, pending their involvement. But for that to happen the buyers needed to close on the property. The County agreed to table the adoption, but the closing of the ski area never happened. The County finally decided to move forward with the adoption without the landowners. The updated plan includes a Future Land Use Map that identifies general land uses for the ski area property as a Recreation Oriented Development.
- Sarvis Creek Area Plan (adopted 1996), reaffirmed that the plan is active and valid in 2017.
- Steamboat Area Land Use Plan SALUP, adopted in 1991. Acknowledgement of expiration of the plan 2016.
 - Acknowledged the plan was repealed and replaced with the adoption of the 1995 SSACAP.
- Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan (adopted 1995, amended the Tourism Chapter in 2005)
- Open Lands Plan (adopted 1995)
- West Steamboat Springs Area Plan (adopted 1999, amended 2006)